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ABSTRACT

This publication is a report from a task force charged with developing a vision and making recommendations for a comprehensive system of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery within the state of Maryland. The challenge was given urgency due to three factors: (1) rigorous standards for students that were part of school improvement programs could cause more students to drop out unless changes were made in instruction; (2) the number of young people will increase over the next decade, as well as the proportion considered at risk; and (3) positive correlation between levels of educational achievement and learning in the new labor market of the 21st century will intensify. The Task Force agreed on the following visions: (1) provide rigorous, relevant, and engaging instruction within a supportive environment; (2) prevent students from starting down the path toward dropping out; and (3) collaborate with families, communities, employers, and postsecondary programs to provide integrated support and learning experiences. The report includes a description of who drops out and why; who can make a difference and how; Task Force recommendations; how to implement the recommendations; end notes; and attachments on programs serving at-risk students, dropout statistics, and program approaches. (Contains 10 references.) (JDM)

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MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Making A Difference

Report of the Task Force on Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery

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Spring 1998

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Making A Difference

Report of the Task Force on Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery

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February 1998

Dr. Nancy Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools
Maryland State Department of Education
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Dear Dr. Grasmick:

It is my pleasure as chair of the Task Force on Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Recovery to convey to you our final report. In the early fall of 1996, you charged the Task Force to develop a vision and make recommendations for a comprehensive system of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery within the state's aggressive education reform efforts.

The thirty-four members of the Task Force, that you appointed, recognized the urgency and the gravity of the challenge that you placed before them. With rising expectations and standards both in education and in the work world, major system changes would be needed to provide the safeguards and supports to ensure the success of *all* students.

Over the course of nine full day meetings, supplemented by several meetings of a volunteer subcommittee, members reviewed and discussed the materials provided by a variety of experts, as well as extensive statistical information and reports. Task Force members then worked in small groups to better internalize and synthesize ideas, issues and recommendations. To elicit feedback, a draft report was submitted to an outside panel of national experts and widely circulated. In addition, five discussion meetings were held with a wide variety of stakeholders throughout the state. The comments and suggestions received from several hundred interested people were discussed at the final meeting of the Task Force and incorporated, as appropriate, into the final report.

As chair and representing the entire Task Force, I would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the many MSDE staff who shared their wisdom with us, but most particularly to Irene Hechler, Diana Bailey and Gerry Day of your staff and Marion Pines of the Institute of Policy Studies at JHU, for unfailing support, provision of resources, and authoring multiple drafts for Task Force consideration.

Each member of the Task Force thanks you for the opportunity to be part of improving the learning experience for all Maryland students, with our particular focus on those students most at risk of not completing their education successfully. We look forward to the next step in this important process of change...implementation. We do not anticipate that this task will be easy or fast, but are confident that under your leadership, the effort will be successful.

Sincerely,

Nancy Kopp

Nancy K. Kopp
Chair

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Executive Summary

As we approach the 21st century, dropping out of school has especially dire consequences for young people and for society as a whole. Twenty years ago, in a less complex society and a less demanding job market, almost 90% of high school dropouts could find regular work and lead satisfying lives. Today, only slightly more than a third of young dropouts find full-time employment and only 11% of them are earning more than poverty level wages[1]. High school graduates do twice as well, and college graduates fare six times better. Clearly, education pays off for students.

Beyond the personal costs of dropping out of school, it has been calculated that the average dropout costs the community more than $300,000[2]. We know that 75% of the individuals received by the Maryland Division of Corrections report themselves as high school dropouts, and each year of incarceration costs State taxpayers more than $30,000 per inmate[3]. Over 50% of Maryland's public assistance clients are high school dropouts. Clearly, investments in education pay off for all of us.

It, therefore, makes sense, for the sake of the individual student and for the community, and for the economy as a whole, to assure that all our young people graduate from high school so that they can begin to realize their full potential as self-sufficient individuals and contributing members of the community.

Recognizing that it is vital that all students graduate from high school, and acknowledging potential impacts of the on-going statewide high school improvement program and plans for the new high school assessments, Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent

of Schools, challenged 34 Marylanders, under the chairmanship of Delegate Nancy K. Kopp, to *work with a sense of focused urgency*, to develop a vision of an education system characterized by a comprehensive system of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery, and to recommend changes needed to achieve that vision.

The Task Force first agreed on a vision. In the 21st century, Maryland's educational system must work for **all** students. Schools must:

- **Provide rigorous, relevant, and engaging instruction within a flexible, supportive, and culturally sensitive learning environment.** Standards must be high and responsive to the demands of the marketplace. School leaders must truly expect, and work to assure, success for all students.
- **Prevent young students from starting down the path toward dropping out, intervene when problems are anticipated or discovered, and actively work to recover students who have dropped out to assure that they too ultimately graduate.** Individual schools, clusters of schools, and school systems must be organized so that students are prepared to learn from the very beginning and do not "fall through the cracks" — particularly at times of transition into or between schools and services. Counseling and other support systems must be able to follow students during the entire education process. Educational options must be available to students not responsive to the traditional classroom.
- **Collaborate with families, communities, employers, and postsecondary programs to provide integrated support and essential learning experiences both within and outside of the traditional school environment.**

The Task Force recognized that Maryland cannot achieve this vision without essential changes in planning, school organization, curriculum,

instructional methods, school climate, professional development, resource allocation, and school-community relations.

During Task Force meetings, eight themes emerged from the presentations, research findings, briefing papers, and evaluations — themes that should inform and guide the school change process. The eight themes are:

- The importance of effective early intervention because the pathway to dropping out starts very early. Schools must realize that it is in their interest to anticipate potential problems and address them as early as possible.
- The need for continued intervention in middle and high school, particularly around the transition years, since early intervention is not an "immunization shot" and problems occur throughout a student's career.
- The need to change instruction and the way it is delivered to underscore the relevance of learning to "real world" applications.
- The need for continuous support from caring adults to provide stability and instill in students the confidence to succeed. This is particularly needed in the case of students who move among schools frequently and have little stability in their family lives.
- The need for rigorous expectation of success for all students, coupled with flexibility in methods of instruction to assure mastery.
- The need for interagency and community partnerships in order to share staff, expertise, and resources.
- The need for accountability of all partners in the educational process — students, teachers, school staff, parents, and community. There must be clear, consistent, measurable outcomes.

- The need to re-engage dropouts through recovery strategies that lead to the attainment of the high school diploma. Particular methods of achieving this outcome may include re-enrollment in traditional schools or use of alternative programs and providers. Schools and alternative programs have much to learn from each other.

Given the complex factors associated with dropping out of school, schools by themselves cannot ensure that all students will succeed. Achieving our vision requires the active involvement of families, schools, employers, government, a wide range of community agencies and organizations, post-secondary institutions, and the students themselves. Concerted action must be undertaken and sustained on many fronts to fully address the needs of students and, in doing so, to prevent, intervene, and recover dropouts.

The Task Force, therefore, recommends that the Maryland State Department of Education take specific steps to lead and support State and local efforts in this area. The Task Force's recommendations are based on the eight themes identified above as the key elements for this report. They urge the Department to:

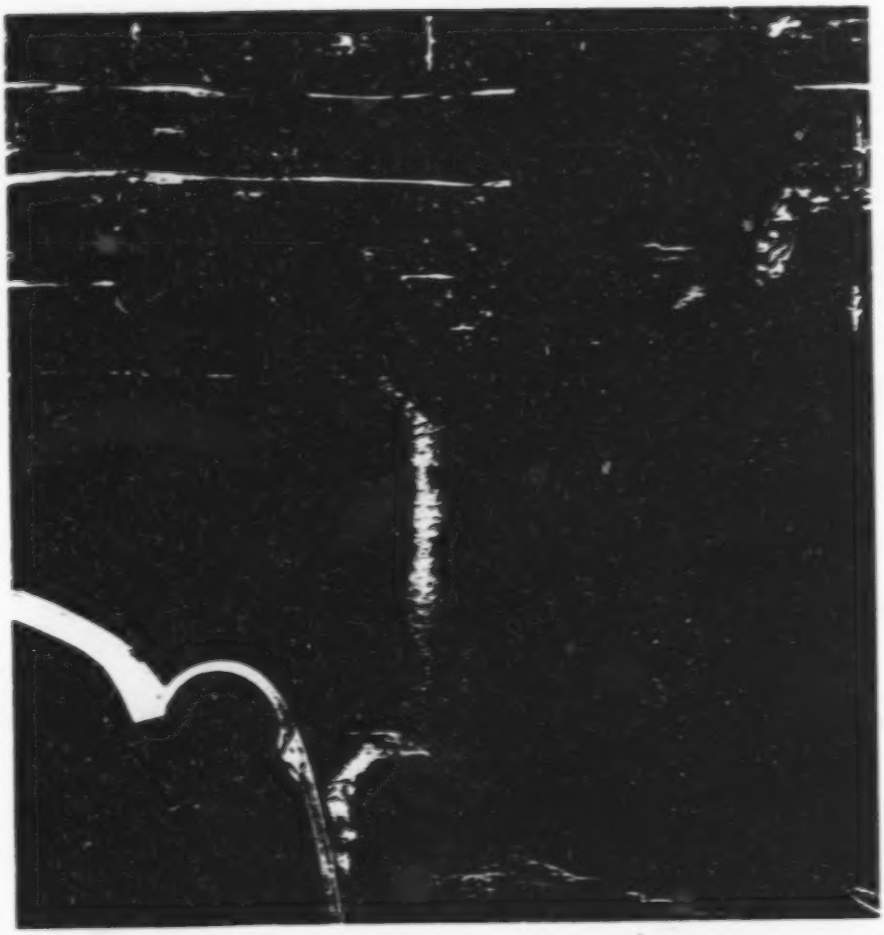
- **Demonstrate Commitment to Dropout Prevention Through Both Statements and Action.**
  - Make school completion for all students a top priority and a responsibility of all school leaders at all levels.
  - Increase funding to support comprehensive services, support local efforts for greater coordination of services among and between schools and other agencies, and create incentive programs to encourage innovation and more public/private efforts.
- **Develop at Both the State and Local Levels and in Each School a Systemic Capacity to Solve the Dropout Challenge.**
  - Create and distribute to all schools and school systems a comprehensive dropout prevention template that can serve as a framework for needs assessment and planning.
  - Strengthen leadership and staff capacity, including increased funding for professional development.

Schools must realize that it is in their interest to anticipate potential problems and address them as early as possible.

- Encourage and establish a process for periodically identifying and disseminating information about tested promising practices and programs, and urge their adoption by local agencies and schools. This should include use of electronic media, such as a Web Page incorporating latest research and best practices.

■ **Enhance Accountability to Increase the Return on Present and Future Investments.**

- Improve State and local capacity to measure and determine the effectiveness of programs and services over time and in different contexts.
- Establish rigorous criteria to accompany all funding that contributes to dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery to ensure that funded programs demonstrate positive results. Support positive programs and terminate or alter unsuccessful ones.
- Revise the school performance reporting system to include dropout recovery results.



The Task Force strongly urges Dr. Grasmick, the Maryland State Board of Education, and local school systems and communities to move expeditiously to address the themes and recommendations in this report.

The Challenge

In the early fall of 1996, Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, challenged 34 Marylanders to work together as a Task Force. Under the chairmanship of The Honorable Nancy K. Kopp, the Task Force was charged to **develop a vision and make recommendations for a comprehensive system of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery** within the context of the State's aggressive education reform efforts. The challenge was given urgency by three critical factors:

- Rigorous expectations and standards for students are part of the ongoing high school improvement program and the proposed high school assessments planned for the class of 2004.
- The absolute number of young people will increase over the next decade, as will the proportions of groups traditionally considered to be "at risk".
- The positive correlation between levels of educational achievement and earnings in the new labor markets of the 21st century will intensify.

The absolute number of young people will increase over the next decade, as will the proportions of groups traditionally considered to be "at risk."

It is the Task Force's belief that as the new high school improvement program, with its proposed assessment plan, moves from development to implementation, it can be anticipated that many more students will "fall out" of secondary schools *unless* changes are made in instruction, supported by a continuum of appropriate services and opportunities from pre-kindergarten to grade 12 to postsecondary education.

In accepting the challenge, Task Force members committed to think beyond the current structure and to envision the major education system changes and new kinds of community partnerships that would provide the safeguards and supports that ensure the success of all students.

FACT: 10,340 Maryland young people left school in 1995-1996 without receiving a high school diploma[1].

FACT: Over 50% of Maryland's current public assistance clients are dropouts[2].

FACT: 75% of the individuals received by the Maryland Division of Corrections report themselves as high school dropouts[3].

FACT: Only 11% of dropouts are able to find full time jobs paying over the poverty wage[7].

FACT: Nearly 80% of Maryland firms that hire manufacturing or skilled trades workers reported either some or a great deal of difficulty finding qualified workers[8].

These facts make it clear that in order to enjoy a fulfilling life, staying in school, completing an education, and gaining high level skills are of greater importance than ever before as labor market expectations have become more demanding. In recognition of these realities, the Maryland State Department of Education has established a set of rigorous performance standards for all school systems and schools in the State. Consistent with the long term national trend, Maryland's dropout rates have declined from 1990 to 1996 from 6.5% to 4.58%. However, over this period, only a third of Maryland's 24 school systems and less than half of the secondary schools have achieved the satisfactory standard that Maryland has set for the dropout rate[9].

Students drop out of school because they perceive a lack of relevance of school learning to life, a sense of hopelessness and lack of vision for the future...

Who Drops Out of School and Why?

There is no single cause, single reason, or single profile of the student who will drop out of school. However, research over the past 20 years identified student behaviors and characteristics that correlate with dropping out of school. Based on a review of literature and research, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) identified six characteristics associated with risk of educational failure. Subsequent studies using the *National Educational Longitudinal Studies: '90 and '92* published in 1995 proved these factors to be good predictors of low achievement and dropping out. Characteristics associated with youth most at risk of dropping out of school are:

- lives in a single-parent household,
- lives in a low-income household,
- is home alone more than three hours a day,
- is the child of high school dropout (s),
- has a sibling who dropped out of high school, and
- speaks limited English.

The reasons students drop out of school are varied and complex. Students are pulled out, pushed out, and drop out of school (Sklarz, 1994)[10]. Students are *pulled out* because of factors such as teen parenting,

substance abuse, lack of perceived value of schooling by peers, families, and communities, financial and family responsibilities for care and support, and the attraction of money and peer groups outside of school. Students are *pushed out* of school because of behavior and attendance problems that result in disciplinary action and skills deficiencies that grow over time, placing students at performance levels well below their peers. Students *drop out* of school because they perceive a lack of relevance of school learning to life, a sense of hopelessness, and a lack of vision for the future, and the inability of schools and communities to provide the wide range of support services and alternative programs and strategies to meet their needs.

Rush and Vitale (1995) identify dropping out as a process that begins during the elementary years and increases in likelihood as students experience more and more difficulties in the later school years[v]. Departing from the many previous studies that focus on family background and intelligence as key predictors, Rush and Vitale identify academic achievement, educational aspirations, and feelings of self worth as key predictors. Focusing more specifically on the question of whether schools actively contribute to students dropping out, based on data from the follow-up study of the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, Wu (1993)[vi] found that:

- There is a relationship between high dropout rates and poorly organized academic programs.
- There is a relationship between high dropout rates and morale problems in schools.
- Students' exposure to poor teachers is more likely in schools with high dropout rates.
- Students attending schools with a high dropout rate were more likely to have fewer opportunities for "purposely conceived, well-planned, well-organized, and well-executed" classroom activities.

There is a relationship between high dropout rates and poorly organized academic programs.

What Will Make A Difference?

The Task Force examined the broad range of state-administered education funding programs (approximately $200 million in FY '98), that relate in varying degrees to dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery. It sought to understand how these State and federally funded efforts contribute to progress made in student and school performance, with an emphasis on decreasing the school dropout rate. The Task Force

found that most programs have historically been administered as separate initiatives at the State and school system levels. This is counterproductive and must be changed. These programs must work together in a focused and coordinated way in order to reduce the school dropout problem.

The Task Force surveyed local school systems to identify school practices, programs, and strategies of demonstrated effectiveness and to understand local issues that pertain to dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery. While programs and services differ among school systems and schools, there is broad agreement that insufficient attention and resources are devoted to providing the type of consistent supplemental support and assistance needed by students. Issues and needs identified through the local survey include:

...there is broad agreement that insufficient attention and resources are devoted to providing the type of consistent supplemental support and assistance needed by students.

- Additional funding to support coordinated approaches to dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery;
- More intensive, school-based academic counseling and support services. Virtually all respondents to the survey indicated a need for more pupil services staff and program options at all levels (guidance counselors, pupil personnel workers, psychologists, nurses, support service programs, and alternative education);
- Appropriate class size to meet individual needs of students;
- Ongoing career development and quality career-related programs available to all students;
- More flexible schedules and programs, and transportation that enables all students in need to access summer, evening, and weekend programs;
- Development of effective methods to follow up on and re-engage dropouts;
- Strong early childhood programs coordinated with and building on existing initiatives in schools and communities;
- Sharing of effective programs and practices among school systems and schools;
- Development and/or expansion of active partnerships including school, families, communities, agencies, and employers working together in a comprehensive approach to dropout prevention; and

- Analysis of the potential impact of the high school reform efforts, including the proposed assessments, on students' decisions to drop out of school.

Key themes and issues consistently came to the fore in the Task Force discussion of program models, research findings, briefing papers, evaluations, and surveys of local systems. These themes are:

The importance of high quality early intervention because the pathway to dropping out starts very early and skills need to be reinforced throughout the primary grades. Integrated programs and recognition that all staff have a responsibility for all students is critical.

The need for continued and sustained intervention in middle and high schools, with particular attention to the transition grades since early intervention is not an "immunization shot." Except for Maryland's Tomorrow, there is a comparative void in State resources allocated at the middle school and high school levels.

The need for continued and sustained intervention in middle and high schools, with particular attention to the transition grades since early intervention is not an "immunization shot."

The need to make curriculum and instruction more relevant to the "real world" as exemplified by Career Connections, which stresses learning by doing, earning while learning, and curricula organized around career clusters planned with the full participation of local business.

The need for continuing support from caring adults — i.e., mentors, advisors, teachers, case managers, advocates, and counselors — is perceived by both youth and researchers as a critical stabilizer in the often chaotic lives of many young people.

The need to maintain high expectations for all students and to adjust teaching styles to assure mastery since a watered down curriculum will shortchange students in a competitive global economy.

The need for State and local interagency and community partnerships to share staff, ideas, data, resources and develop joint initiatives, underscoring the belief that it takes a whole community working together to help a child achieve success.

The importance of accountability and continued emphasis on achieving positive results could be enhanced by using strategies based on research and evaluation and sharing promising practices.

The need to re-engage and re-enroll dropouts through aggressive recovery strategies that create high quality education options and work programs that lead to a high school diploma.

II. Responding to the Challenge

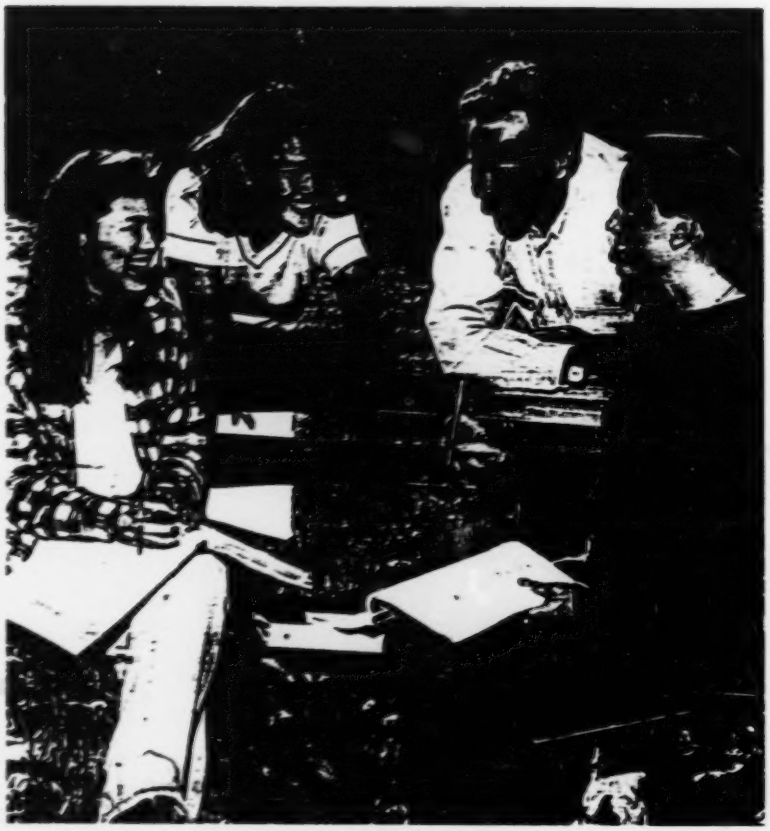
Task Force Vision of Where We Ought To Be

Education systems in Maryland work for all students because schools:

- **Provide instruction that is rigorous, relevant, and engaging** within a learning environment that is nurturing, respectful, and culturally sensitive.
- **Prevent, intervene, and recover dropouts** by pro-actively anticipating and responding to early warning signals, by providing a continuum of services and alternatives as a safety net for students experiencing difficulty, and by reconnecting out of school youth.
- **Collaborate with families, communities, employers, and postsecondary programs to provide the integrated support and essential learning experiences** to help students prepare for the future as citizens, workers, and lifelong learners.

... Maryland will need to focus, with renewed urgency, on those aspects of education reform which support students and develop a public education system that has little tolerance for students dropping out of school.

With this vision in mind, the Task Force believes that it is in everyone's interest to make dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery a priority for action. In addition to increasing the personal confidence and well-being of the individual, high school completion is important to our society. A prepared and able workforce, self-sufficient families, safe and vibrant communities — all require that students served by public schools acquire and apply skills and knowledge in ways that will permit them to lead productive, contributing lives. Failure to provide the opportunities and supports needed by potential dropouts to be successful in the learning enterprise has disastrous and far reaching consequences that impact not only our current generation of students, but generations to come. Research indicates a strong relationship between the educational attainment of parents and that of their children. The individual successes achieved now translate to multiple successes for future generations.



The challenges noted in this Task Force report are real. Changing demographics point to increasingly more students in poverty; more students in need of support, nurturing, and a sense of belonging by schools, families, and communities; more students with complex problems that impede learning; and, therefore, more students at risk of dropping out of school. Mandates for schools and students to achieve higher standards of performance will increase the quality of public education for all students, but without substantial academic and personal support systems, these same requirements could serve to push at-risk students out of school. Failure to both learn from and expand and replicate the strategies, programs, and practices that are known to work for at-risk students critically affects our ability to achieve success with all of our students.

The Task Force believes that for its vision to be achieved, Maryland will need to focus with renewed urgency on those aspects of education reform which support students and develop a public education system that has little tolerance for students dropping out of school.

The Task Force recognizes that dropping out of school is a process and not an event. Mastery of essential skills in the early learning years and achievement of early critical developmental milestones profoundly affect students' success in school in later years. New developments in brain research underscore the vital importance of the early years of life (birth to three) as a unique "window of opportunity" for the development of the critical connections for language, motor, and cognitive development. "By third grade, students who eventually drop out of high school are significantly different in behavior, grades, retention, and achievement scores from those who eventually graduate." (Chester Finn, 1989) Early indicators serve as beacons for early intervention.

...dropping out of school is a process and not an event.

However, early intervention alone will not solve the school dropout problem. Concerted and continuous efforts need to be made across the grades to actively engage students in learning; provide the educational options, programs, and structures that will help students with differing needs; identify students confronting difficulty at the earliest point for intervention; and put in place a full continuum of services that provide academic and personal support. Beyond programs and activities that promote learning, the most important dimension is the human dimension. Throughout the learning continuum, a caring, nurturing environment needs to exist for every student.

Given the complexity and multiple factors associated with dropping out of school, ensuring that all students benefit from and succeed in school cannot be accomplished by schools alone. **The Task Force strongly believes that achieving school completion for all students will require the active involvement of families, schools, employers, government, a wide range of community agencies and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and students themselves.** The Task Force believes that concerted action must be taken and sustained on many fronts to fully address the needs of students and, in doing so, prevent, intervene, and recover dropouts.

Who Will Make A Difference and How?

...it is imperative that schools and communities reach out, engage, and support families...

- **Families** provide the early stimulation, nurturing, and learning opportunities that enable young children to master the foundation skills and attitudes toward learning that are essential for achievement in school. Throughout the years of schooling, families set the expectations and provide the advocacy and reinforcement necessary to help students meet with success. Research provides compelling evidence that when parents and other family members are involved in education, the school performance of their children increases. Because of the importance of family participation and involvement, it is imperative that schools and communities reach out, engage, and support families so that they have the information and understanding to be productively involved with schooling in five key dimensions:
  - Parenting - Universally, parenting is a most rewarding, but very difficult job. Competent parenting requires an understanding of child development and practices of nurturing, disciplining,

supervising, and teaching. Schools and communities can support parents and families by providing developmentally appropriate parenting information.

- Communicating - Ongoing, two-way communication between home and school is essential. Families should express concerns, provide information and insights, and discuss matters regarding children's progress. Schools need to create a welcoming environment, communicate routinely with parents, and respect the contributions that family members make to the learning process.
- Reinforcing Learning - Families strongly influence the expectations and aspirations of children and contribute to children's understanding of the importance of learning. By establishing an environment in which learning is important, families set the stage for school success. By creating a setting that requires the completion of homework, discussion of school activities, reading, and reinforcing skills at home, families support learning and send a powerful message of its importance.
- Volunteering - Students benefit from family participation in school activities. Whether on site through tutoring or at home telephoning other families to organize events, parental volunteering signals to students that families value and contribute to schooling. It also allows family members to observe and be a part of the activities in the school.
- Decision-Making - Parental participation in school planning and decision-making helps to ensure that decisions benefit children, increases the school's understanding of the learning needs of all students, and requires school personnel to acknowledge the importance of family-school partnerships.

■ **Students** need to understand the importance of the high school diploma to their own future employment, self-sufficiency, and well-being. Students need to recognize that their own behaviors and decisions can promote or derail their future opportunities in school and in life. By assuming responsibility for their own learning and by setting high expectations for themselves and their peers, students contribute greatly to creating an environment in which school completion matters. Resisting negative influences, seeking positive peer group affiliations, participating in positive and productive activities, helping younger children through tutoring or mentoring — are all ways in which students can take an active role in dropout prevention.

...achieving school completion for all students will require the active involvement of families, schools, employers, government, a wide range of community agencies and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and students themselves.

It is important that families, schools, and communities create the opportunities and supports to help students have a positive vision of their future and engage in the types of activities and relationships that build success. This includes providing information and experiences that lead students to understand the positive effects of school completion and the consequences of dropping out of school; providing multiple opportunities that engage students in positive peer group affiliations through community service, clubs, and projects; and through careful supervision of students' activities and networks both in and outside of school.

- **Community** agencies, organizations, businesses, and other institutions are essential partners in dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery. Schools and school systems do not have the capability and cannot provide the full range of supports needed to bring about success for all students. The complex and diverse needs and circumstances of students and their families demand that schools, community agencies, and community institutions work in tandem to ensure streamlined, effective services. From faith/religious institutions to government administered health programs and juvenile services, the importance of joint initiatives and complementary programs and services is clear. Dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery relies on working grassroots partnerships and the involvement of Local Management Boards in support of students. Community agencies, organizations, and institutions should:

  - Examine ways to use schools as hubs for service delivery and establish school-linked services wherever possible.
  - Establish strong connections for referral, information sharing, and collaborative problem-solving.
  - Participate in joint initiatives that provide a holistic approach to service delivery such as programs that bring together schools, juvenile services, and other agencies to decrease the incidence of truancy, and school-connected family support centers that combine services to help teen parents and their young children.
  - Promote the importance of school completion with children, youth, and parents served by community organizations through publications, personal contact, and other means.
  - Actively participate in dropout retrieval initiatives by using community organizations to identify, refer, and serve out of school youth.

...providing information and experiences that lead students to understand the positive effects of school completion and the consequences of dropping out of school;

■ **Employers** are dependent on the education system for the development of their potential workforce and consumers. During the past two decades, the nation's labor markets have been characterized by turbulence and massive structural change. Causes include important shifts in the industrial and occupational composition of employment, continuous technological changes in the workplace, corporate restructuring and downsizing for survival in competitive global markets, growing diversity in the workplace, and rising levels of foreign immigration. Employers expectations are rising for young workers. Employers demand higher cognitive skills levels than ever before in our history. Employers have a huge stake in the product of the education system and are essential to ensuring that students graduate with the skills, knowledge, and experiences for effective workforce entry. Because of this, employers can contribute to dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery and should:

- Create opportunities for students and teachers to experience workplace settings to connect school and work. This occurs through sponsoring shadow days, internships, field trips, guest speakers, presentations, paid work experience, and other workplace learning opportunities.
- Collaborate with schools and school systems to develop special joint programs where students fulfill graduation requirements while working, such as through apprenticeship-school linkage programs.
- Use student performance in school as a criteria in hiring decisions to reinforce the connection between achievement in school and successful employment.
- Provide input to local school system curriculum development efforts to assure relevance.
- Implement programs that encourage employees to serve as mentors and tutors for at risk children and youth.
- Provide information, resources, and leave policies that encourage parents to be involved in children's schooling and enable participation in parent-teacher conferences, field trips, and other school activities.
- Establish incentive programs through workplaces to encourage students to continue in school and meet rigorous expectations.

Employers demand higher cognitive skills levels than ever before in our history. Employers have a huge stake in the product of the education system and are essential to ensuring that students graduate with the skills, knowledge, and experiences for effective workforce entry.

■ **Higher education institutions** provide essential services in four dimensions: (1) teacher and staff preparation; (2) professional development; (3) research bridged with practice; and, (4) delivery of services to youth. With primary responsibility for teacher prepara-

tion, colleges and universities need to deliver programs that result in a teaching force that is able to work effectively with all students, particularly those who are at risk of dropping out of school. This includes providing the coursework and multiple, supervised field experiences to ensure that new teachers have high expectations for student performance, are equipped with the skills and experiences to adjust instruction to the learning styles and needs of all students, can identify and address early warning signals of difficulty, are knowledgeable of and able to deliver effective teaching practices, can collaborate with family and community agencies, and have the personal characteristics that embody caring, nurturing influences for students. As partners in continuous professional development, colleges and universities need to provide practical opportunities for professional development that help school and related staffs upgrade skills and knowledge to strengthen capacity. Higher education institutions also play an important role in educational and related research and bridging the knowledge gained to practice.

With primary responsibility for teacher preparation, colleges and universities need to deliver programs that result in a teaching force that is able to work effectively with all students, particularly those who are at risk of dropping out of school.

Community colleges and the college/university system are instrumental partners in improved delivery of services to youth. Major strides can be achieved in dropout prevention and recovery as colleges and universities further develop partnerships with schools and employers to fully assume this role. Higher education institutions should:

- Strengthen programs in critical areas to better equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to work effectively with students from diverse backgrounds given the complex problems and circumstances that many students confront.
- Assure that prospective teachers are proficient in strategies for teaching reading and math.
- Implement joint programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels that encourage students to plan and prepare for further education, particularly targeting students with little exposure to postsecondary settings.
- Establish structures that promote co-enrollment opportunities and summer learning for young people in the college setting.
- Provide incentives to encourage faculty to partner with local school systems.
- Find ways to credential work-based learning for postsecondary admissions.

- Operate innovative, alternative learning programs in the college or community setting that deliver specialized instructional programs with pathways to college for young people who find it difficult to succeed in a more traditional high school environment.
- Collaborate with schools and community services to fully establish college linked programs that help prepare youth for capable parenting.
- Establish community service programs that encourage and assist college students in serving as mentors and tutors for younger students.
- Conduct research to identify teaching strategies that meet the needs of at-risk students.

■ **Schools** need to examine how they promote and how they may hinder student success and make the critical changes and continuous improvements necessary to foster the achievement of all students. Schools should:

- Engage in comprehensive planning and decision-making with critical stakeholders, including parents and community service providers and employers, to ensure that school services reflect the joint vision and connections for rich learning opportunities and essential student supports, particularly for students in at-risk circumstances.
- Use accountability measures to drive continuous improvement by routinely examining disaggregated data and information from a wide range of sources to determine important areas for improvement and to put in place strategies and practices that are likely to be effective.
- Restructure to provide, wherever possible, smaller learning communities, more flexible schedules for students and staff, options and alternatives through which students can learn and demonstrate proficiency, including community and workplace-based programs and activities.
- Improve instruction to ensure that a common core of relevant, rigorous offerings and expectations truly exist for all students and that methods of instruction are culturally sensitive, accommodate different learning styles, focus on mastery, and include use of technology.
- Examine school practices to ensure that disciplinary actions

Schools should restructure to provide... smaller learning communities, more flexible schedules...options and alternatives... including community and workplace-based programs and activities.

provide consequences to modify students' behaviors without disengaging students from learning.

- Develop support systems so that a continuum of pupil services and supplemental academic assistance exists within the school, including extended day and extended year programs, that are strongly connected to community services for children, youth, and families.
- Ensure that instructional methods reflect the needs of students so that students benefit from alternative education *approaches* and not just an alternative education placement.
- Monitor each student's performance to identify difficulties at the earliest point of intervention, provide case management to ensure that students stay on track, and prepare and support students before, during, and after key transition periods between critical grade levels and between and among services and alternatives.
- Develop leadership and staff competence in working effectively with students who are at risk of early school leaving through cohesive and practical staff development strategies such as mentoring and training that provide for application of skills learned.
- Establish vital school-home-community partnerships to bring together essential resources and services in a comprehensive, accessible, and understandable way for students and their families.
- Actively intervene to re-engage students who have dropped out of school by providing alternatives and supports that permit a "fresh start".

School systems should put in place practices that personalize learning for all students, and use instructional practices that focus on mastery of essential skills.

■ **School systems** support the efforts of schools and establish policies, partnerships, and programs that prevent, intervene, and recover dropouts. School systems need to engage stakeholders, at all levels, in planning and decision-making and develop partnerships with parents, community agencies, organizations, higher education, and employers that will help schools deliver relevant, learning rich, and connected services. School systems should also target assistance and support to help schools achieve continuous progress in serving students who are at risk of dropping out of

school, put in place practices that personalize learning for all students, and use instructional practices that focus on mastery of essential skills. Additionally, school systems should:

- Examine school system disciplinary policies and procedures so that they do not disengage students from the learning process, but provide options, wherever possible, to continue learning even when a student must be separated from a particular school.
- Provide staff assignment policies and procedures that ensure that students who are most at risk benefit from instruction from competent, capable, and caring teaching staff.
- Apply research to practice so that schools are aware of and have access to methods of instruction and student support that have demonstrated effectiveness for students in at risk circumstances.
- Ensure that schools benefit from and apply advances in technology to learning.
- Encourage programs and sustained activities that prepare and support students as they transition between levels of schooling and among programs and services.
- Engage in joint initiatives with community agencies and organizations to provide innovative programs and services tailored to meet the needs of potential and re-engaged dropouts as a natural part of the learning enterprise.
- Actively participate in community-based partnerships to recover dropouts and re-connect youth to schooling.

Apply research to practice so that schools are aware of and have access to methods of instruction and student support that have demonstrated effectiveness for students in at risk circumstances.

■ **State government** should provide policy, leadership, assistance, and resources to encourage and support interagency collaboration and comprehensive strategies that prevent and recover dropouts. Specifically, State government should:

- Provide funding to implement Task Force recommendations.
- Seek federal financial and technical support.
- Encourage business participation and foundation support of these initiatives.
- Encourage widespread support at every level of government to ensure that resources and attention are focused on preventing, intervening, and recovering dropouts.
- Coordinate State level initiatives that impact dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery.
- Identify, disseminate, and support adoption of best practices.

III. Task Force Recommendations

Recognizing that ensuring high school completion for all students requires that action be taken by schools and communities, the Task Force recommends that the Maryland State Department of Education take specific steps to lead the State and assist local efforts to prevent and recover dropouts. These recommendations are based on the eight themes identified by the Task Force earlier in this report. (see p. 5)

1. Demonstrate Commitment to Dropout Prevention Through Both Statements and Action.

Implementation of these recommendations will enable Maryland to realize the full intent of its reform initiative and strengthen its capacity to help all students succeed.

■ Make School Completion for All Students a Top Priority

- Alert school and community leaders to the urgency of the dropout challenge and ways that the challenge can be successfully met.
- Mobilize to engage students, families, employers, schools, and community organizations in understanding the problem and taking action.
- Promote education reform strategies that have both high expectations and the essential support services to enable all students to achieve rigorous standards.

The relationship among student success, capable families, productive workplaces, and vibrant communities needs to be clearly understood and advanced by all. Achieving an education system with little tolerance for students dropping out of school will require the involvement of each school community, supported by its larger community, to see that critical changes in school organization and instruction are made and integrated support services are available for all students in need.

■ Focus and Increase Funding to Support Comprehensive Services

- Fully implement a consolidated, comprehensive planning approach.
- Provide funding incentives to encourage interagency and community collaborative efforts, such as family support centers connected to high schools.
- Seek new funding to increase capacity, build on current successful programs and strategies, and address gaps in services identified through comprehensive needs assessment processes.
- Expand and replicate effective student service delivery and staff development initiatives so that they operate in all communities evidencing need.

The Task Force found that resources to address the dropout problem were insufficient in the early learning years and before, during, and after the key transition periods at the middle and high school levels. Clearly, the Task Force believes that creative use of existing funds and increased partnering with the community is an essential part of responding to the dropout prevention issue; but these steps alone are not sufficient to adequately address the problem. An increase in State aid for dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery to expand resources for all students at-risk — across all grades levels — is imperative.

2. **Develop at Both the State and Local Levels and in Each School System a Systemic Capacity to Solve The Dropout Challenge.**

   ■ **Create and Implement a Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Template for Needs Assessment and Planning**

   The Task Force believes that Maryland's educational systems and community partners need a framework for dropout prevention; a flexible and comprehensive needs assessment template that can be used to guide local planning and action. To this end, the Task Force identified the positive and effective characteristics of schools and school systems that prevent and recover dropouts. The Task Force recommends that the Maryland State Department of Education further develop this template/framework as part of a needs assessment process that includes strategies for disaggregrating and examining local data and linking needs to promising practices in student learning and support. The development effort should involve school systems and community partners. The resulting framework will provide a resource for schools and communities to use to identify needs and gaps in services and help develop comprehensive plans that address the unique needs evidenced within the school and community.

■ Strengthen Leadership and Staff Capacity

Continued collaboration with the Maryland Higher Education Commission and the K-16 Partnership is essential, with an emphasis on requiring preservice courses, field experiences, and professional development in areas related to dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery. This includes identifying research-based best practices in teacher training programs that ensure graduates with effective skills and appropriate sensitivities, and the design of staff development options that integrate instruction, student support, and school improvement. The Task Force further recommends that leadership academies, professional development schools, mentoring, and other experiential, practical staff development strategies be used to strengthen professional and leadership development.

■ Encourage Adoption of Promising Practices

Promising practices exist throughout the State and nation. We need to use all available means to ensure that these promising programs and practices are accessible to all Maryland schools, with the technical expertise available to assist schools in adopting practices that have demonstrated effective outcomes. Therefore, the Task Force recommends that the State disseminate information, showcase working programs and strategies, and strongly encourage and assist local school systems and schools to adopt effective programs and practices that will:

- Assure mastery of literacy and math skills in elementary schools.
- Reorganize schools within existing facilities to create learning environments that meet the diverse needs of students.
- Provide alternative approaches and options for students.
- Create and expand transition support strategies and practices that assist students through key periods of transition (from preschool to elementary to middle to high to postsecondary, and between and among alternatives/options).
- Establish a continuum of academic and personal support through school, interagency, and community partnerships.

■ Develop Models and Guidelines for Dropout Recovery

Dropout recovery is currently a second-chance system. Clear procedures and model programs need to be established to demonstrate how State aid may support community alternatives, including those that combine work and learning, that are approved by local school systems. This includes both developing pilot sites to demonstrate working

models that meet rigorous standards and creating a system of documenting dropout retrieval outcomes.

3. Enhance Accountability to Increase Return on Present and Future Investments.

■ **Improve State and Local Capacity to Determine the Effectiveness of Programs and Services Over Time**

This includes building data system capacity, at both the State and local levels, to track the long-term outcomes of initiatives supported by public funds. Current systems need to be reviewed to establish clear and universal definitions. Data collection procedures that provide an accurate picture of dropout rates and re-enrollment results are needed.

■ **Establish Rigorous Criteria for all Funding Sources That Support Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery to Ensure That Funds Demonstrate Results**

As a part of achieving this accountability, the Department's Requests for Proposals and Requests for Applications should specify criteria to ensure that:

- Proposed programs/services are based on needs assessment and research findings.
- Proposed staff development meets quality standards.
- Evaluation meets minimum requirements to ensure that all funds are attached to a process that can discern effectiveness.
- Interagency collaboration is evident.
- Continued funding is contingent on demonstration of results.

By providing criteria in these critical areas for proposal and application development and approval, the Department would further assure that public funds supporting dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery will yield the outcomes intended in their appropriation.

■ **Revise the School Performance Reporting System to Include Recovery Results**

The importance of recovery efforts — re-engaging dropouts — is a new area of effort recommended in this report. This will require joint efforts between schools and communities. Current school performance systems will need to be revised to move from an event based accounting of dropouts, which is subject to counting the same dropout more than one time, to a method that is sensitive to and accounts for successful recovery efforts.

IV. Next Steps

The Task Force on Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery's recommendations embrace Maryland's strategy for education reform. Implementation of these recommendations will enable Maryland to realize the full intent of its reform initiative and strengthen its capacity to help all students succeed. The Task Force strongly suggests that a State implementation team be established as soon as possible to establish priorities and to plan the implementation of the recommendations. The implementation team should be charged to move these recommendations forward by developing an action plan that defines strategies, timelines, resources, and expected results. The plan should be in place by December 1998.

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Issues for Further Examination

A draft version of the Task Force report was presented to several hundred individuals for review and comment. While most of the comments and suggestions resulting from the review process are reflected in the final report, five were deferred to the implementation phase for further examination. These issues require extensive discussion and technical expertise beyond the initial scope of the Task Force. The Task Force believes that these issues are worthy of in-depth discussion and require the perspective of a broad range of individuals, technical experts, and stakeholder organizations for resolution.
The five issues are:

1. **Mandatory School Attendance.** Should the age for mandatory school attendance be increased from age 16 to age 17 or 18? The Task Force noted that the current requirements may provide a signal to youth that school participation is optional once age 16 is reached. Yet, extending the required age would be of little use without having a full range of appropriate learning alternatives, options, and support systems in place. Implications of increasing the mandatory age are many and include such things as costs for truancy abatement, potential impact on early satisfaction of graduation requirements, and potential effect on community programs, including those of colleges and universities.
2. **General Equivalency Diploma (GED).** How should the GED fit within a comprehensive system of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery? Currently, the GED provides a vehicle for many individuals to achieve a high school diploma

after dropping out of school. The Task Force noted the important function that the GED assumes in credentialing youth for entry into community colleges. A review of research and significant discussion are essential to clarifying the part that the GED and state funding for GED programs should play within a comprehensive system of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery.

3. **Funding Allocation.** How can distribution of funds be assured across the grades when Free and Reduced Price Meals (FARM) data are considered in the funding formula for programs targeted toward children who are considered to be at-risk? The Task Force recognized that older, FARM "eligible" students were less likely to participate in the Free and Reduced Price Meals program due to several factors, including perceived stigma. When funding decisions are made solely on FARM data, it is believed that high schools do not proportionately benefit from these funds. Further information is needed to determine the nature and extent of this issue. Funding models that mitigate this problem may need to be identified and examined for potential use.

4. **Interagency Commitment and Participation.** How can active interagency and community commitment, participation, and accountability for dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery be assured? The Task Force recognizes that many of its suggestions and recommendations rely on the full participation of many individuals, agencies, and organizations at both the State and local levels. The implementation team should consider strategies and plan specific actions that will result in the full participation of the people and entities necessary to achieve implementation of the Task Force recommendations.

5. **Confidentiality.** How can agencies best share critical information to enable students and their families to receive seamless and holistic services? Throughout this report, the urgent need for interagency communication and collaboration on behalf of young people is stressed. Youngsters in need of intensive support are usually known to multiple agencies. The need for agencies' staffs to work together effectively is imperative. Rules and regulations prohibiting the sharing of important information, while protecting confidentiality, may also make the provision of integrated services difficult. The implementation team should examine this issue and where appropriate propose strategies that will improve information sharing among agencies.

V. End Notes

1. *Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth.* Policy Issues Seminar, 97-03. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies. Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies. June 1997.

2. ASUCLA Communications Board. 1996.

3. *Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth.* Policy Issues Seminar, 97-03. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies. Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies. June 1997.

4. Maryland State Department of Education (1997). *The Fact Book: 1996-1997. A Statistical Handbook. Maryland Public High School Dropout and Retentions. Grades 9-12: 1995-1996.* Baltimore. MD: Division of Planning. Results. and Information Management.

5. Maryland Department of Human Resources.

6. Intake Reports. Maryland State Department of Education

7. *Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth.* Policy Issues Seminar, 97-03. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies. Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies. June 1997.

8. Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development: *Survey of 1,000 Businesses,* October 1997.

9. Maryland State Department of Education (1997). *Maryland School Performance Report: 1997. State and School Systems.* Baltimore. MD: Division of Planning, Results, and Information Management.

10. Sklarz. David P. (Summer 1994, Vol. 1. Number 1). *Research Into Practice: Reexamining, Redefining, and Redesigning Schools. The Journal of At-Risk Issues.* Clemson. SC: National Dropout Prevention Center and Network.

VI. Attachments

Attachment A: Fiscal Year 1998 Programs Serving At Risk Students

Attachment B: Dropout Information: United States and Maryland

Attachment C: Program Approaches

FISCAL YEAR 1998 PROGRAMS SERVING AT-RISK STUDENTS

INITIATIVE	TARGET POPULATION	INITIATIVE DESCRIPTION	NO. OF STUDENTS SERVED	FY 98 FUNDING
Extended Elementary Ed. Program (EEEP)	Children who are 4 years of age and potentially at-risk of not succeeding in school.	Provide initial learning experiences to help children develop and maintain the basic skills needed for successful school performance.	9,880 children	$ 14,896,739
Non- & Limited English Proficient (NEP/LEP)	Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade public and private (as requested) school children who speak a language other than English which has impacted on ability to learn in English.	Supports programs for NEP/LEP students that provide instructional assistance and services to enable these students to acquire and improve English language skills and cultural understanding and thus be able to participate successfully in the academic and social activities of their regularly assigned schools.	16,000 students	$ 7,797,000
Targeted Poverty	High poverty schools.	Funds may be used to extend or enhance the goals, objectives, and strategies in the school improvement plan.	119 schools	$ 26,163,360
State Dedicated Compensatory Education (SCE)	Poverty and educational need determine participating schools.	These funds augment federal Title I funds and are used to develop supplemental educational programs in schools with high concentrations of low-income children.	21,736 students (4,278 SCE only schools and 17,458 combined Title I/SCE schools)	$ 17,574,344
Title I: Part A Local School Programs	Schools with high concentrations of low-income students.	School-wide programs upgrade the school's education program. Targeted assistance programs provide services only to students who are below age and grade expectations.	62,125 students (302 schools)	$ 95,337,298
Title I: Part B Even Start Family Literacy	Parents, children, and other family members.	Family-focused program with integrated early childhood education, adult literacy, basic skills instruction, and parenting education.	263 students	$ 1,170,968
Title I: Other Migrant Education Migrant Head Start Delinquent and At-Risk	Children, ages 0-21, of migratory and seasonal farm workers, and their parents. Children and youth who reside in local correctional facilities and at-risk youth.	Regional summer school programs planned in conjunction with staff in the home base States of Florida and Texas. Supports partnerships between schools and correctional facilities to improve educational services and to prevent at-risk youth from dropping out of school.	3,694 students	$ 1,050,705
McKinney Homeless Assistance Act	Preschool age and school age homeless children and youth.	Ensures that all homeless children and youth have equal access to public education and that barriers to enrollment and attendance are removed. Funds also provide supportive services.	2,052 students	$ 262,460

ATTACHMENT 2

INITIATIVE	TARGET POPULATION	INITIATIVE DESCRIPTION	NO. OF STUDENTS SERVED	FY 98 FUNDING
Challenge Schools	Schools that are low performing with respect to standards and/or have high mobility or ESOL rates or other mutually agreed to criteria.	Enables schools and their communities to create, implement, and monitor plans for focused school improvement.	36,000 students	$ 7,638,827
Reconstituted Schools	School eligible for reconstitution based on below satisfactory and declining performance with respect to MSPP.	Series of steps taken by the State, local school system, and designated schools to make structural changes to improve performance and be held accountable to State education standards.	39,000 students	$ 3,719,200
Dropout Prevention MD's Tomorrow Middle School Program MD's Tomorrow High School Program	Students in grades six to eight who are at-risk of not graduating. High school students who are at-risk of not graduating from high school (identified in eighth grade).	Two types of models provide services to improve student behavior and academic performance. Multi-year, year round instruction and support to help youth meet academic expectations, get a high school diploma, and transition to further education and/or employment.	6,784 students	$ 10,881,575
Annapolis Road Middle School	60 students exhibiting extremely difficult behaviors.	Year-round, extended day school providing academic instruction, social skills development, behavior intervention, counseling and support services, and family intervention.	60 students	$ 1,601,655
Disruptive Youth	Schools or clusters of schools to support the development and expansion of special programs for disruptive youth.	Provides a model continuum of prevention and intervention programs that encourage and promote positive behaviors and reduce student disruption.	7,500 students	$ 457,553
Children At-Risk	Funds are available to 24 school systems to conduct activities to benefit children at-risk. The Governor's Council on Adolescent Pregnancy also receives funds to support interagency teen pregnancy initiatives.	Programs, activities, materials and training for prevention of child abuse, youth suicide, and teen pregnancy.	Programs are aimed at training staff.	$ 386,000
School Community Centers	Youth between the ages of five and twenty in each of Maryland's school systems.	Provides for the use of school facilities during non-school hours through coordination between local school systems and parks and recreation agencies. Provides comprehensive leisure and supplementary education activities.	100,000 students and families	$ 725,300
Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities	K - 12 public and nonpublic schools.	Supports programs that prevent violence and the illegal use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.	738,497 students	$ 5,672,592
Infants and Toddlers	Children from birth to age three who have developmental delays.	Provides early intervention services for children and their families.	6,609 children	$ 5,237,314

ATTACHMENT B

Drop Out Rates in the U.S. and Maryland

American society is becoming increasingly demanding of its citizens. Our age has been called post-modern, post-industrial, post-atomic, the communications age, and the computer age. By any name, it is a high tech world that requires more skill and knowledge from its citizens. In order merely to survive, it has become essential to acquire the fundamental abilities and credentials that open the doors to employment and advanced education. As these facts gain wider recognition and as a result of strong efforts made by public schools, it is not surprising that a higher percentage of students have been completing high school. The high school credential is an imperative first step on the ladder to self-sufficiency; the fate of high school dropouts in today's society is one of extremely limited opportunity when compared with opportunities in the less complex world of yesterday.

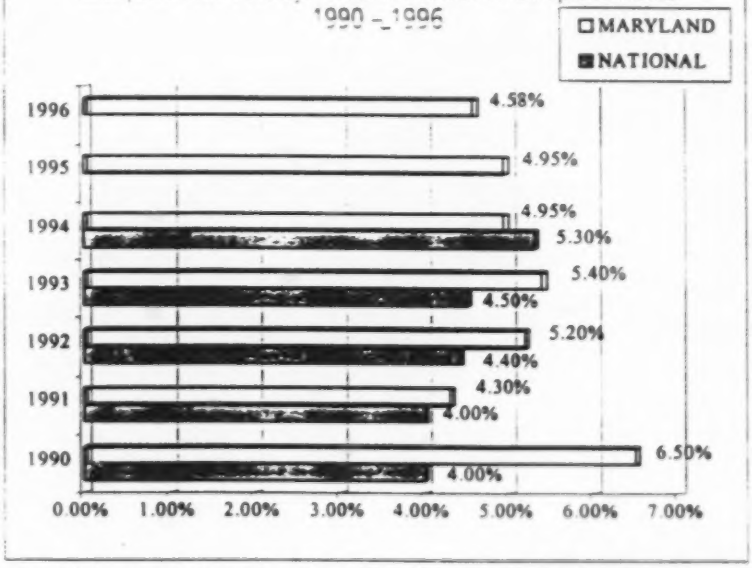
According to the U.S. Department of Education, the long term national trend for dropouts has been declining over the past two decades (6.7% in 1979 to 4.5% in 1993). This trend is confirmed by recent dropout rates in Maryland. Maryland's dropout rate has declined in a period during which graduation requirements were increased. Maryland rates were 6.5% in 1990, 4.95% in 1994 and 1995, and 4.58% in 1996.

Maryland is close to the national average in percentage of dropouts. In the 1995-1996 school year, 11,357 students (4.58%) in grades 9-12 withdrew from school before graduation or completion of a state-approved program. However,

CHART A

Comparison of Maryland and National Dropout Rates

1990 – 1996



1. National statistics are based on Grades 10 to 12 as of October 1995 and no data is available for '95 and '96. Source: *The Condition of Education*, 1996.
2. Maryland statistics are based on Grades 9 to 12 as of July. Source: MSDE, *Maryland School Performance Reports*.

In 1994 new survey collection techniques and population weighting were used.

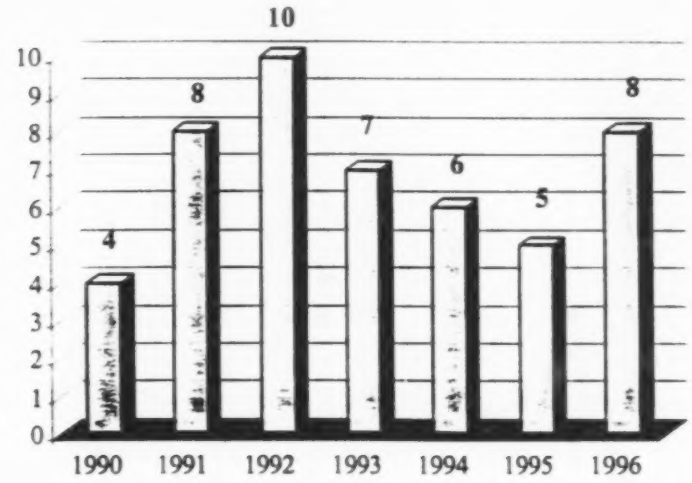
[1] Calculated as *event rates*: The percent of 10th-12th graders who were dropouts a year later. The U.S. Department of Education calculated these rates as of October. In Maryland event rates are calculated as of July 1 and are based on grades 9 to 12. It is important to note that the dropout rate is a frequency count of dropping out and not a count of individual students.

ATTACHMENT B

CHART B

Maryland School Systems

Meeting Satisfactory State Standard – Dropout Rate (3%)



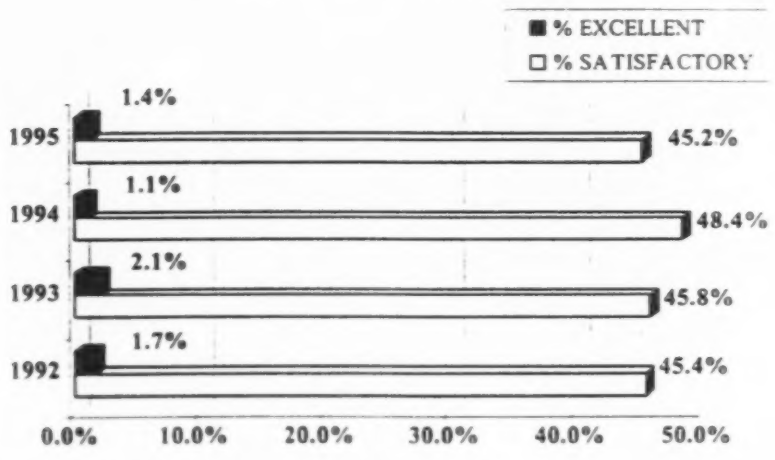
Source: Maryland State Department of Education N= 24

this exceeds the MSPP satisfactory standard rate of 3%. Therefore, **Maryland is considered, by its own standards, to be performing at a less than satisfactory level with respect to dropout rates.** Trend data on the performance of Maryland school systems and schools further support this conclusion. Chart B shows the number of ***school systems*** in Maryland that were able to achieve a satisfactory rating on the student retention standard from 1990 to 1996. Over the seven-year period, only about a third of the 24 school systems in Maryland have been able to achieve the satisfactory standard.

CHART C

Percentage of Maryland Secondary Schools

Meeting State Dropout Rate Standards



Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Chart C shows the percentage of **secondary schools** that achieved either a satisfactory or excellent rating on the student dropout rate standard from 1992 to 1995. Less than half of all schools have been able to reach this performance benchmark.

The picture looks even less promising when examining "holding power," the degree to which students who enter ninth grade graduate four years later[2]. Statewide, this statistic has hovered around 75% for the past few years.

[2] This statistic does not take into account student mobility, nor does it include students who took longer than four years to graduate.

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The Task Force reviewed research findings from a variety of sources and particularly noted the approaches summarized below:

Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP), a state-funded program for four- year-olds who live in a Title 1 school area and are determined to be potentially at risk of not succeeding in school. The program provides daily two-and-a-half hour sessions designed to meet the cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs of young children. Groups of 20 youngsters are supervised by two teachers who assess their growth and development over time. Parents have daily opportunities to participate in the school-based program as well as enrich their childrens' learning outside of school. EEEP is serving over 8,000 youngsters in 23 Maryland school systems.

Longitudinal studies have demonstrated reductions in special education assignments, and significant improvements in test scores at the 3rd, 5th and 8th grade levels over children who did not have the pre-K experience, demonstrating that the positive effects of EEEP persist through the middle learning years.

Success for All, a program model designed to ensure that students begin with success in the early grades and maintain success through the elementary years. Quality pre-school, full-day kindergarten; an intensive reading program — 90 minutes a day — involving homogenous reading groups that are reassessed and regrouped every eight weeks; one-to-one tutoring for students with difficulties; cooperative learning approaches to intermediate reading, language arts, writing and math; and family support services to increase family involvement -- these are the hallmarks of the Success for All program. The model has been carefully researched and has been shown to produce significantly higher reading achievement, reduce special education assignments and increase attendance. It has been implemented in over 140 elementary schools in 56 districts in 20 states, many using redirected Title I as the funding source.

The Comer School Development Model, is designed to address the needs of the whole child by emphasizing school-based mental health services and parent and teacher involvement in restructuring the school's program. This model is less specific content-focused and more concerned with principles, such as consensus decision making, collaboration, school planning management teams, mental health teams and staff development. School and district level evaluations have found that the Comer model increases student achievement over that in similar schools, with significantly higher averages in math, reading and language scores on the California Achievement Test. Some Comer schools have achieved signifi-

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cant declines in suspension and absences. The Comer model has been operating in over 150 schools and redirected Title I funds can be a funding source.

The models described above have, for the most part, been implemented at the elementary level. The Task Force recognized its charge as system-wide and thus also studied findings from initiatives that focus on adolescent and high school youth:

Dropout Demonstrations, were eighty-nine demonstration projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education in the late 80's. Sixteen were evaluated by the American Institutes of Research in Palo Alto, California. Findings from the three-year study published in 1996 were mixed, with the most positive results found at the high school level. The contributing factors were identified as:

- Adding services (classroom based) instead of pulling students out;
- Access to career counseling, work experience and paid work;
- Flexible class schedules;
- Access to a range of coordinated services from multiple agencies; and
- Counseling services and adult advocacy: a "network of supportive adults."

The lead researcher, Dr. Robert J. Rossi, concluded that the theme of "care, concern and advocacy" was found in all of the demonstration projects that achieved positive student results, and should be key elements of any dropout prevention initiative.

Maryland's Tomorrow (MT), in its tenth year of operation, is mostly a state-supported initiative that funds local areas to bring together the resources of schools, the workforce development system, parents, and the business community in a comprehensive effort to assist youth who are at risk of school failure. Students are identified in the 8th grade who are below grade level in reading or math or who are over age for grade because of school failure. Intervention starts the summer before entering high school and continues for a year after graduation. Building on lessons learned from the dropout demonstrations cited above, MT is characterized by sustained relationships between students and caring adults, a comprehensive mix of practical services (basic skills instruction, career skills development, personal skills development), high expectations and standards, intensive services in the 9th grade and continuity of supportive student/advocate involvement on a year-round basis. A variety of summer learning experiences are available to participants, as well as summer jobs provided as part of the collaborative arrangement with the local workforce development system. Currently operating in every school district in Maryland, the program serves about 6,000 high school students in 75 schools, reaching only a portion of the students identified as at risk of dropping out. Research findings in a comparison group evaluation showed that the program produced a 27% decline in the number of dropouts in the first three full

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cohorts and outperformed comparison group students on the Maryland Functional Tests in 100% of the evaluated schools by the third cohort.

Career Connections is Maryland's name for its School-to-Career state-wide system reform. With seed funds from the federal government, Career Connections is about curriculum change; helping students begin to understand the relevance of what they are learning; instructional change so that students become active learners; and work-based learning so that students get real world experience to help shape their career choices. The strategies are built on research funded by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education in the U.S. Department of Education and conducted by the Research Triangle Institute in North Carolina and the American Institutes for Research in Palo Alto. Their studies found that three factors were most critical to the success of dropout prevention programs:

- The integration of vocational and academic curricula;
- Counseling with attention to personal issues, career counseling, employability development, and life skills instruction; and
- Personal, supportive attention from adults.

Career Connections when fully implemented will be a K-16 system that integrates education reform, economic development, and workforce development. Recent national studies of school-to-work/careers found that students not only gained concrete skills but were less likely to drop out and more motivated to move on to college.

* * * *

To summarize, it seems clear that the evaluations and research incorporate broad and fundamental principles that must undergird a successful dropout prevention strategy. The core principles being:

- **The continuity of support from caring adults;**
- **Creative forms of instruction to ensure learning;**
- **A combination of guidance and high expectations;**
- **Rich connections to the workplace; and**
- **Effective linkages to the community.**

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"Scaling Up" Innovative Practices

While there is a body of knowledge that describes and supports numerous successful practices, principles, projects and programs, concern has been expressed about the capacity of school systems and the practitioners who work in them to incorporate and extend new ideas about teaching and learning at a scale that will reach and benefit the hundreds of thousands of students in need. Dr. Sam Stringfield of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk at Johns Hopkins University has developed some hypotheses regarding successfully going to scale:

At the program/design level: Clearly stated goals as well an understanding of the curricular, instructional, and organizational mechanisms that the reform proposes are essential. Technical assistance must be available in order to uphold at least minimum implementation standards as well as full knowledge of the resources needed to achieve strong implementation.

At the school level: School staff must understand and share in the school's goals and agree to work with a strong facilitator and/or leadership team. An honest self-assessment process is needed to identify the reform design and strategies that build on a school's strengths and address its weaknesses. The entire school must understand and be prepared for several years of work to achieve the institutional change.

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